

A. Results of Excavations in Malaya

JOHN MATTHEWS

JOHORE LAMA

Johore Lama is the site of a sixteenth century Malay town on the Johore River estuary, some fifteen miles from Singapore Island. The town was originally strongly fortified, enclosed by a high earthen wall and a steep ditch and by ramparts and other fortifications along the shore of the Johore River. The total length of the walls surviving on the landward side at the present time is in excess of one mile. The site of the town occupies an elevated region overlooking the estuary and has long been deserted. A modern Malay village lies outside the town wall on the northern side on a level, low-lying, sandy area.

History

A very brief account of the history of the town is a necessary introduction to the archæological discoveries recently made there. When, in 1511, the Portuguese attacked Malacca, the Malay sultan, Mahmud, fled the town and for short periods established himself at a number of places, in the Riau Archipelago and on the mainland to the south of Malacca, moving at intervals until his death in Sumatra in 1528. Ala'u'd-din, Mahmud's son, settled at several places with his court, mainly on the Johore River, vying with the Portuguese at Malacca for revenue from the sea trade passing through the Malacca Straits.

In 1545, Ala'u'd-din was well established on the Johore River, at Johore Lama. However, his security was shattered by the formidable kingdom of Atche, when the Atchinese attacked and destroyed Johore Lama in 1564. Ala'u'd-din was taken to Atche, where he died.

Johore Lama was then deserted until 1572 when Ali Jalla, a later and powerful Malay sultan again took up residence there. Ali Jalla's reign was not serene, and Johore Lama was attacked both by the Atchinese and the Portuguese, and fell, in 1587, to a Portuguese attack. The town was then looted and destroyed and has never been reoccupied.

Archæological Background

In recent years the site of the town has attracted the attention of a number of scholars. G. B. Gardner visited Johore Lama on several occasions between 1932 and 1935, collecting beads and pot sherds; H. C. Beck has examined and described over 600 beads from Johore Lama. H. G. Quaritch Wales was there in 1938, and made a brief excavation in the modern Malay village which lies below the ancient town. He discovered sherds, both earthenware and Ming blue and white porcelain, but nowhere did the archæological deposit exceed eighteen inches, and none of the porcelain was earlier than the 16th century.

Between 1948 and 1954, a very large number of porcelain and earthenware sherds were collected from Johore Lama and adjacent sites on the Johore River by P. R. D. Williams-Hunt, H. D. Collings, C. A. Gibson-Hill and others. In 1953 Williams-Hunt excavated a small trench in the modern village, repeating Quaritch-Wales's earlier excavation by finding blue and white Ming porcelain and earthenware in a shallow, unstratified deposit. That same year, 1953, Williams-Hunt and P. Wheatley surveyed the earthen wall of the old town.

Later in 1953, G. de G. Sieveking and Gibson-Hill excavated the remains of two ancient boats at Johore Lama. These had been reported some time before and it was hoped that they would prove to be of considerable antiquity—but it was discovered that one must have been beached between fifty and a hundred years ago, and the other might possibly date from the beginning of the 18th century, but not earlier. It is important to emphasize that none of these discoveries made at Johore Lama indicate any occupation of the ancient town before the beginning of the sixteenth century.

In November 1954, one of the Johore Lama villagers discovered a buried hoard of blue and white porcelain while digging his garden; the porcelain is of a rather better quality than the majority of the sherds that are to be found at Johore Lama. Sieveking has shown that the pieces from the hoard which can be dated should be placed in the latter part of the 16th century. The hoard could very well have been buried during the Portuguese sack in 1587.

Last year, W. G. Solheim II and Matthews excavated for a short season at Johore Lama. Their excavations were concentrated mainly on the fortifications of the old town overlooking the Johore estuary and do not concern us here, except that the two periods of occupation and the two occasions of destruction were very clearly represented in the archæological sections. The point that I do wish to report now is that a very considerable number of sherds—porcelain, stoneware and earthenware, were found in stratified deposits associated with the structures of the fortifications. They can be concisely dated between the two limits of occupation—1545 and 1587. A very considerable number of sherds, again porcelain, stoneware and earthenware, were found in a low mound within the town walls, but a little removed from the fortifications. The contents of this mound—which was composed almost entirely of sherds, have been carefully studied. Out of a total of more than 21,000 sherds, 7,035 are blue and white Ming porcelain.

It is logical to assume that this pile of sherds must be related to the periods of occupation between 1545 and 1587. Almost a dozen porcelain plates and bowls have been reconstructed from this source—a point which would seem to indicate that the vessels represented by the sherds were smashed at or very near the place in which the sherds were found. The most conclusive evidence for the dating of these sherds comes from the excavation of the structures of the fortifications; for, without exception, the pieces represented by sherds from the excavations are duplicated by pieces represented by sherds from the mound. There is no difficulty, therefore, in assigning this great number of recently discovered porcelain sherds to the period 1545–1587. The details of the profile, paste, decoration and form of the pieces represented at Johore Lama have been very fully recorded; and this record gives a very complete catalogue of the trade porcelain that was reaching

the Johore River during the 16th century. The significance and importance of this record will not be confined to Malaya, but will have application throughout the southeast Asian region, and beyond.

THE KERUBONG HOARD

A buried hoard of porcelain and stoneware was discovered at Kerubong, a Malay village seven miles to the north of Malacca, in October 1960. Unfortunately, the exact circumstances of the find have been elusive; but it appears that a party of Malay workmen, digging a drainage ditch at the edge of a wet rice field, came upon pottery in the ground. A total of eighty-three vessels were recovered; sixty-four are complete, the remainder represented by fragments. I was able to examine the site very soon after the discovery had been reported. The hoard had been buried in a fine sandy loam, and the uppermost vessels were two feet below the present ground surface when they were found. No disturbance could be seen in the soil above the cavity which had contained the hoard; a close examination of the clean-cut side of the ditch did not reveal any stratification.

The hoard includes both porcelain and stoneware. The porcelain is polychrome, monochrome, and with underglaze blue decoration; the stoneware is both glazed and unglazed. There are eight large plates, eight small plates, thirty-two bowls, sixteen small bowls, two jars, four jarlets, seven covered boxes, one water-sprinkler, one bottle, one sandstone grinding stone and a cylindrical grinder, one stopper, and fragments of the rim of another bowl. The villagers say that a large stoneware jar had been inverted over the plates and many of the bowls; other pieces, for which there was no room under the jar, had been placed next to it.

Only two pieces are true porcelain—a squat bowl with blue and white decoration and a large celadon dish, unfortunately broken. For the rest, the pastes range from fine porcelaineous, through hard granular, to fine soft stonewares. All are rough provincial pieces, none approaching the first quality of Chinese porcelain.

The glaze of the blue and white pieces has a strong blue or green tint; within the foot-rim the glaze is usually whiter—in some cases an opaque milk-white. The glazes are rarely smooth, sometimes crazed, and invariably pitted.

There are very marked resemblances between the pieces in the Kerubong hoard and pieces that have been excavated at several sites in the Calatagan Peninsula, some 150 miles to the south of Manila. Some pieces from Malaya are so like others from Calatagan that the only possible conclusion is that they must have been made at the same kilns at about the same time. For example, one of the large Kerubong blue and white plates has a central design of a *ch'i-lin* looking back over its left shoulder. This is precisely the same design as that on a similar plate from Calatagan illustrated by Dr Robert B. Fox. Two Kerubong plates with plain rim, flowers (perhaps chrysanthemums), and leaf scrolls on cavetto and centre appear to be almost precisely similar to two from Calatagan (illustrated by Professor O. R. T. Janse).

R. B. Fox has illustrated a small, plain white bowl with plain rim and slight foot-rim; this is the same as three of the small white bowls from Kerubong. A small white bowl, or cup, from Kerubong with foliate rim is duplicated by one

from Calatagan. A small Calatagan jarlet with underglaze blue design on the shoulder of floral elements filling cloud collars with beaded tassels between can be compared directly to a jarlet from Kerubong with the same design. There are many other marked similarities of decoration, and also similarities of paste, glaze, form and profile.

Many of the pieces in the Kerubong hoard have a marked similarity to export wares illustrated and described by various authors. W. B. Honey has illustrated five jars from a large collection of small jars and boxes in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. One of these is a small jar with cloud collars on the shoulder which have beaded tassels between them; this must be compared with the jarlet from Kerubong, as they directly resemble each other. Honey puts these jarlets, together with similar covered boxes, in a class, and he suggests that this class is Annamese and dates perhaps from the 15th century. The blue and white covered boxes from Kerubong similarly belong to this class. Two faceted jars illustrated by Honey are directly similar, both in form and general style of decoration, to the polychrome faceted jar from Kerubong. Honey suggests that such polychrome pieces represent an attempt by a Chinese immigrant to introduce overglaze painting into Annam. The small faceted polychrome jar from Kerubong should also be included in Honey's class of Annamese jars and covered boxes. W. B. Honey mentions that the many examples of distinctive stoneware and porcelain found in Annam and Tonkin suggest a considerable Annamese industry dating from the 16th century.

J. A. Pope illustrates a small plate with a *ch'i-lin* design. This plate was given to Pope by Langdon Warner who acquired several in Annam, and is very like the Kerubong *ch'i-lin* plate. Pope has also illustrated a plate from the Ardebil Shrine collection which has a marked similarity with the large, hole-bottomed plate from Kerubong; both of these plates have a group of banana leaves drawn on the cavetto in the same manner. Pope mentions that the group to which these plates belong has not been precisely identified and is usually attributed simply to the 15th century.

A large dated blue and white bottle in the Seraglio Museum in Istanbul, pointed out by Hobson, has an inscription which dates it to 1450 and says that it was made in Annam.

Some of the Kerubong pieces seem to belong to a group of provincial blue and white wares that has been mentioned by Sir H. Garner. This group contains dishes with deeply undercut foot-rims and bases which may or may not be glazed. They are generally decorated in a fifteenth century style, although Garner suggests that they date from the early 16th century. This group is generally found in the Philippines and Indonesia, but Garner says that it has little resemblance to either Swatow wares, or the normal export wares of Chingtechen, Kiangsi Province, China.

Mr S. OKUDA has drawn attention to a large group of porcelain and stoneware which exists in Japan and which does not appear to have a clear Chinese origin. This group includes monochromes, polychromes, blue and white wares, and covers a wide range of shapes. Okuda gives this group a family name 'Annamese Ceramics', and lists many particular points which characterize this ceramic family.

For example, foot-rims may be high and large; hexagonal diaper is often a ground design and a floral pattern with four petals sectioned by a 'sword-point' cross is common; also, a swirl or coil is a very usual element of the Annamese decoration.

Several of the pieces illustrated by Okuda have obvious similarities with some of the Kerubong hoard. Okuda illustrates a blue-and-white bowl with a central design of a 'sword-point' cross which is repeated in three of the Kerubong bowls. This Japanese bowl, and another, have the external hexagonal diaper decoration of one of the Kerubong bowls. Okuda illustrates two blue-and-white bowls with figures and horses which, he says, represents one of the distinctive Annamese styles; a Kerubong bowl has the same decoration and profile. Another element of Okuda's Annamese family is common on the Kerubong pieces—the swirl or coil which is present on the four large and the four small plates, on three large bowls and five small bowls, on the jarlet and on the covered boxes.

These comparisons and the similarities only demonstrate that many of the Kerubong pieces can be placed in Okuda's 'Annamese' group. This conclusion, and Okuda's classification, is supported by the other comparisons which can be made with pieces described and illustrated by various authorities, and which have also suggested that the Kerubong hoard contains wares that deserve the attribution: Annamese.

Among the many export wares found in Southeast Asia there is one large group, to which many of these Kerubong pieces belong, a group which contains many wares that are now recognized as Annamese. The distinctiveness of this large and and comprehensive group should be emphasized, and identified with the name of Okuda. The boundaries of the group are at the moment rather vague but its recognition helps to clarify the many problems which await the student of Southeast Asian ceramics. The Annamese wares were probably made and exported during a long period which may cover all of the Ming dynasty and probably continued after, at least to the end of the 17th century.

Dr T. Volker, in his monograph on the ceramic trade of the Dutch East India Company in the sixteenth century, describes how the Company made use of very large numbers of Annamese wares, particularly when it was difficult to get supplies from China. He says that a junk from Tonkin arrived in Batavia in 1663 with 10,000 coarse porcelain bowls; he further states that at a very conservative estimate out of a total of some 12 million ceramic pieces imported to Batavia between 1602 and 1682, about 1,450,000 were Annamese, arriving after 1663. Volker remarks that the Annamese kilns must have had a remarkable capacity for the mass production of coarse, cheap wares, and that very few of these wares ever found their way to the West.

COMMENT

The discussion of Dr Matthews' paper concerned itself mainly with the problems presented by the Annamese (Tonkinese) wares. These have occupied the increasing attention of scholars within recent years, and several of those in attendance were intimately familiar with the vast collection of such wares, generally ascribed to Annam, in the Djakarta Museum, brought together by Baron van Orsoy de Flines during his long term term as curator of the ceramic collections of the Museum.

The discussion emphasized that the wares as a class have become clearly distinguishable by the type of clay used and also by peculiarities in drawing and overall design characteristic of the group. Dating, however, remains imprecise; it is arrived at primarily by inference as the result of comparison with similar examples of Chinese manufacture which may be dated with a fair degree of certainty. Notwithstanding the fact that the class has sufficient characteristics of its own to be properly considered a group in itself—probably of Annamese origin—little more can presently be established, especially as to provenance, since the exact kiln site or sites remain obscure. It was pointed out that certain scholars (Baron de Flines included) had expressed their conviction that the decorated wares attributed to Annamese manufacture had been made at a site (Nan Ts'e-chou) south of Hanoi. In this connection, the famous vase in the Topkapu Saray Museum in Istanbul (London Exhibition, 1935-36, No. 1488) bearing an inscription attributing its workmanship to a potter at Nan Ts'e-chou will be recalled. No further evidence has yet come to light, however.

Although the wares are, certainly, not comparable in quality to the porcelains made for the Chinese Imperial Court in the Ming Dynasty, it is the writer's own opinion that to condemn them all as being 'coarse, cheap wares' is to belie the evidence of the Djakarta collections, among others. Some of the Annamese wares are, in fact, extraordinarily fine in their potting and decoration. So fine indeed that it is not unusual to find Annamese ware labelled as Chinese in Japanese and Western collections. His [R.P.G.'s] experience with the Indonesian collections (both within and without the Djakarta Museum) have also led him to the conviction that it is indefensible to continue to associate necessarily the term 'export wares', including the Annamese with a derogation of their quality. While it is true that the vast bulk of ceramic wares—from whatever source—which found their way into the Far Eastern trade of the time, are of generally inferior quality as ceramic specimens (in contrast to their more classical counterparts), it appears to be equally demonstrable that where the object received in exchange (spices, rare metals, concubines) was of a high degree of desirability, the ceramic object traded was of a high degree of intrinsic quality.

Certainly the finds discussed by Matthews are most important as supplying additional evidence for a *terminus ad quem* of certain of the Annamese types. It is regrettable that the paper was not illustrated. The interested reader is directed to Mr Matthews, Australian National University, Canberra.

R. P. G.